

**MINUTES OF THE
NATURAL RESOURCES APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
January 30, 2006
Room W130, West Office, Building, State Capitol Complex**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sen. Thomas Hatch, Co-Chair
Rep. Bradley T. Johnson, Co-Chair
Sen. Parley Hellewell
Rep. Carl W. Duckworth
Rep. Ben C. Ferry
Rep. Kerry W. Gibson
Rep. James R. Gowans
Rep. Rebecca Lockhart
Rep. John G. Mathis
Rep. Ronda R. Menlove
Rep. Michael E. Noel

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sen. Mike Dmitrich and Sen. Beverly Evans.

STAFF: Ivan Djambov, Fiscal Analyst
Cindy Hopkin, Committee Secretary

SPEAKERS: Jim Karpowitz, Dir. Division of Wildlife Resources; Ernie Perkins, Wildlife and Habitat Legislative Coalition; Bill Fenimore, Utah Audubon Society; Ed Kent, Chair Utah Anglers Coalition; Rep. Stephen D. Clark; Jack Ray, Vice President Utah Water Fowl Association; Sen. Gregory S. Bell; and Bob Springmeier, Chair Great Salt Lake Interpretive Trust.

Note: A list of visitors and a copy of handouts are filed with the committee minutes.

Sen. Hatch called the meeting to order at 2:15 p.m.

MOTION: Sen. Hellewell moved to approve the minutes of January 25, 2006. The motion passed unanimously with Sen. Dmitrich, Sen. Evans, Rep. Ferry, Rep. Lockhart, and Rep. Menlove absent for the vote.

The Fiscal Analyst presented the budget for the Division of Wildlife Resources. DWR has the largest budget in DNR's subcommittee with almost \$50 million of appropriations which is divided into 7 line items in order to have better oversight. The number of fishing licenses sold continues to decline, and the number of hunting licenses sold remains flat. This impacts the division's restricted revenues, which constitute the majority of the division's funding. The General Fund contributes only 7% of DWR's total budget.

The Legislature approved a tax check off for contributions from the public to address mitigation

problems with wolves residing in Utah. The division is requesting a supplemental appropriation for FY 2006 of \$8,000 and an ongoing appropriation for FY 2007 of \$15,000 from the restricted Wolf Depredation Management Account. The analyst recommends the Committee fund this request.

Dir. Karpowitz gave a presentation for the Division of Wildlife Resources. He reported that a 2001 survey shows that wildlife-associated recreation provides over \$1.4 billion dollars to the Utah economy which includes hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching. Over one million people participate in wildlife-associated recreation in Utah each year.

Sen. Hatch requested a break-down of the \$1.4 billion to get an idea of what is contributed from the hunting and fishing community versus the non-consumptive users.

Dir. Karpowitz responded that the amount contributed by hunters and fishermen is about one half and the other half is wildlife watching.

Over 120,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat and watersheds were rehabilitated with the \$2 million received from the Legislature in 2005. The division matched that appropriation with another \$6.5 million so that the division had a total of \$8.5 million which enabled them to do some large, wide-spread projects. A list of those projects was provided for the committee in the DWR handout. The division has the infrastructure to continue with these types of projects this year with even greater efficiency. DWR's goal is to enhance and rehabilitate a minimum of 100,000 acres a year, which does not include re-seeding for burns and other projects.

Mule deer populations continue to increase in terms of total numbers, and the fawn-doe and buck-doe ratios have improved over the past four years which is an indication of better habitat and conditions. Sage Grouse populations continue to increase because of better habitat and predator control. Fishing has improved with full reservoirs and streams.

The division completed two important documents in the past year. "The Comprehensive Wildlife Management Strategy" was designed mainly to secure federal funding through the state wildlife grant program to allow the division to focus on habitat and sensitive species work. The second document "The Wolf Management Plan" was approved also and should lead to delisting in Utah and give management authority to the state.

DWR will realize a \$1 million shortfall in FY 2006 despite cutting \$664,000 from the budget. The division will realize a \$3.4 million shortfall in FY 2007 without a license and fee increase. The shortfall is due to flat sales of licenses and increased costs in labor rates, health insurance, termination pool, and retirement funds. Additional costs have been incurred in motor pool rates and other unforeseen expenditures.

Utah has about 18,000 waterfowl hunters each year who provide a lot of money in terms of

licenses, stamps, federal aid, and etc. Utah has 80,000 visitors to Farmington Bay each year for bird watching most of which are school children, which is a good thing; but it also points out why General Funds are appropriate for DWR.

Ernie Perkins provided a handout of Wildlife and Habitat Coalition Contact Information for the committee and a suggestion of how the Legislature might approach the DWR funding shortfall. The coalition believes the license and fee increase that should be approved is the application fee for limited entry and once in a lifetime hunts. That fee is currently lower than the cost to administer, and is a much lower investment in Utah than in any of the other western states.

Bill Fenimore provided the committee with a handout comparing National and State statistics regarding bird watchers, hunters and anglers. He stated that urban and suburban sprawl will continue to contribute to the loss of wildlife habitat, which in turn will result in a decline of hunters and anglers. The decline in license sales to the hunters and anglers will reduce the revenue to DWR; at the same time increasing wildlife watching will continue to demand for DWR to serve the portion of the public that does not contribute through purchase of a license. He requests that the Legislature provide DWR with additional revenue through the General Fund to adequately fund the agency and serve the broader constituency that thrives in Utah today.

Ed Kent stated that the Anglers Coalition wants to go on record as recognizing and appreciating the efforts of the committee in exploring different funding opportunities to help DWR with their shortfall. He believes the numbers for removing sales tax on hunting and fishing items would be about \$42 million to \$43 million annually.

Rep. Clark assisted by Jack Ray, spoke to the committee about the problems with mercury contamination in Utah especially in the ducks. In a couple of species the degree of mercury contamination is so high that it is too dangerous to eat or even handle them. He supports the \$200,000 appropriation request for DWR.

Mr. Ray stated that Utah's waterfowl hunters shoot some of the highest numbers of ducks of any state in the country, so the mercury contamination is an important issue. Another issue is that a lot of our hunting areas are being taken over by an invasive species. Thousands of acres have become inaccessible and lost usefulness for wildlife and recreation. Funding is needed to help with these problems. Predators are also a problem with waterfowl species.

Sen. Bell assisted by Bob Springmeier, spoke about a request for \$150,000 for a new facility in Farmington. The Farmington Bay Bird Refuge is an important bird migration stop and therefore an important bird watching area. There has been a \$150,000 donation from the Envirocare Environmental Trust with the hope that there will be a matching appropriation from the Legislature. Sen. Bell met with Sen. Bennett and was assured that there will be a third match from the federal government for this project.

Mr. Springmeier stated that the nature center would be fee based which is a strategy to get the birders and other non-consumptive users to assist in supporting DWR through use of the center's facilities and would be operated in partnership by the Interpretive Trust and DWR. The \$150,000 appropriation would allow the planning and designing of the nature center and some road work for better access to the center. The estimated total cost of the entire nature center complex would be about \$7.5 million.

MOTION: Rep. Gowans moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:30 p.m. The motion passed unanimously with Sen. Dmitrich and Sen. Evans absent for the vote.

Rep. Bradley T. Johnson, Co-Chairman

Sen. Thomas Hatch, Co-Chairman